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SOCIAL REFORM IN THE FICTION OF CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN AND OLIVE SCHREINER

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ABSTRACT

One of the contributions of feminist criticism has been the rediscovery of women writers that for some reason have been forgotten or undervalued in intellectual and literary circles. The present dissertation deals with two of those women, who although a century ago were on the height of their activities as social reformers, lecturers, advocates of the Women's Movement and creative writers, have been almost completely neglected. They are Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Olive Schreiner.

As the social issues raised by Gilman and Schreiner ceased to receive political attention and as literary criticism shifted its focus to the more formal aspects of narrative, both writers were relegated to critical silence by historical and literary scholarship. With the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s and the ensuing concern with the political dimension of narrative in the 1980s, they were again brought to the forefront, especially of feminist criticism.

In this dissertation I attempt to rescue the importance of Gilman and Schreiner in their lifetime, by discussing some of the ideas developed in their most influential theoretical works, namely Gilman's Women and Economics (1898) and Schreiner's Woman and Labor (1911). This is effected in the first chapter, after a brief historical contextualization provided in the Introduction. In the second and third chapters I analyse their best known novels, Herland (1915) by Gilman and The Story of an African Farm (1883) by Schreiner.

Since both Gilman and Schreiner believed that the artist should portray the concerns of his or her time, I will investigate how they managed to insert in their fiction the questions discussed in their theoretical books, which reflected the main features of their own time.

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RESUMO

Uma das contribuições da crítica feminista tem sido a redescoberta de escritoras que por alguma razão foram esquecidas ou subestimadas nos meios intelectuais e literários. A presente dissertação trata de duas dessas mulheres, que embora há um século atrás estavam no auge de suas atividades como ativistas sociais, conferencistas, defensoras do Movimento de Mulheres e escritoras, foram quase que completamente negligenciadas. Elas são Charlotte Perkins Gilman e Olive Schreiner.

À medida que as questões sociais levantadas por Gilman e Schreiner deixaram de receber atenção política e que a crítica literária passou a enfatizar os aspectos mais formais da narrativa, ambas escritoras foram relegadas ao silêncio pelos historiadores e pelos críticos literários. Com o radicalismo dos anos 60 e 70 e a crescente preocupação com a dimensão política da narrativa nos anos 80, elas foram novamente trazidas para o primeiro plano, especialmente na crítica feminista.

Nesta dissertação busco resgatar a importância de Gilman e Schreiner durante a época em que viveram, discutindo algumas das idéias desenvolvidas nas suas mais influentes obras teóricas, Women and Economics (1898) de Gilman e Woman and Labor (1911) de Schreiner. Isto é feito no primeiro capítulo, após uma breve contextualização histórica apresentada na Introdução. Nos segundo e terceiro capítulos, analiso seus romances mais conhecidos, ou seja, Herland (1915), de Gilman e The Story of an African Farm (1883), de Schreiner.

Uma vez que Gilman e Schreiner acreditavam que o artista devia retratar as preocupações principais de seu tempo, passo a investigar como isto foi abordado em seus romances, ou seja, como elas conseguiram inserir em sua ficção as questões discutidas em seus livros teóricos, refletindo as principais características de sua época.

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INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation deals with a subject which, although reaching its summit in the last turn of the century, still poses a great deal of questions and arises many responses. The start of the Women's liberation process going on the end of the nineteenth century and known as the "Woman's Question" revealed a number of women writers and thinkers who produced both theoretical and literary works on the theme. In this study I will examine the works of two of those women who became intellectual leaders of the first great blossoming of the Women's Movement: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Olive Schreiner. Besides investigating what these writers have in common, I will also examine the connection between their theories and their fiction. Therefore, I have chosen the most important and well known theoretical and fictional works of each writer: Gilman's Women and Economics (1898) and Herland (1915), and Schreiner's

Woman and Labor (1911) and The Story of an African Farm (1883).

Since my analysis will range from a feminist to a sociological perspective and the authors will be studied within the historical period in which they lived, a brief contextualization becomes necessary. For such, I have relied on Tilly and Scott's Women, Work and Family, as well as on Weiner's From Working Girl to Working Mother to set up the social and historical panorama of Gilman and Schreiner's day, mainly in what concerns the position of women in society.

In their book Women, Work and Family, Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott trace the history of European women's work (English and French) from the pre-industrial era to our days. They divide their analysis into three periods which they call The Family Economy, The Family Wage Economy and The Family Consumer Economy in order to investigate the role women played within each regarding work and family.

In the Family Economy period, which predominated until the beginning of the 19th century, the productive activity was held within the household and involved all the family members -- men, women and children. The role of married women at this time was very diversified and demanding. Besides contributing to the family's economic well being by engaging in production for exchange and household consumption, the woman was also responsible for bearing and taking care of the children (44).

The high fertility rate of this period demanded an interruption in the woman's productive activities, but the equally high infant mortality rate permitted her a quick return

to her productive work, since it shortened the time spent on nursing the children. Tilly and Scott conclude that "high fertility, high mortality, a small scale household organization of production and limited resources meant that women's time was spent primarily in productive activity" (227).

This panorama changed, however, when the production was displaced to larger productive units -- the factories -- and the family members had to leave their homes to work for wages. This transformation in the mode of production started already in 1750 in England, but only later it became a reality in other countries. This new form of economic organization known as the Family Wage Economy posed hindrances to female participation in production by separating the productive and reproductive-domestic ativities from a single place, the household. The married woman had to withdraw from her wage earning activity whenever she was needed in the home or became pregnant. As a result, "her work tended to be episodic and irregular" (228) and men became the primary wage-earners in the family.

With the decline of the textile industry, which employed most women workers, and the development of the heavy industry by the early twentieth century, which preferred "an adult male labour force", the women, who needed to engage in paid work, moved to the terciary sector where "an increasing number of white collar jobs were offered" (228). This period was marked by an improvement of the living standard of many working-class families, then organized on a "consumer economy" basis. The family became "a wage earning unit which increasingly emphasized

[its] consumption needs" (176). The role of family members within this new economic order became more sharply defined, with husbands and unmarried children as wage-earners and wives responsible for childcare and household management. Only those who were obliged by circunstances left their homes to engage in paid work. For these women the staying at home was viewed as the "sign of health, stability and prosperity of a household" (196). While the women of the working class developed this image as the ideal because of economic reasons, the middle class family idealized home as the right place for women on a moral, religious and ideological basis. According to Polly Wynn Allen,

> This ideology, often designated "the cult of domesticity", decreed that women had no place in the industrial work force. It subtly camouflaged the exploitation of women's unpaid labor in the home. It spoke of society in terms of two separate spheres: man's dangerous, public realms outside, and woman's safe, private realm inside, the four walls of home. It ordained women to be purifying agents of family stability by carrying out their timeless roles as wives and mothers enclosed within the boundaries of domestic space. What it obscured about the economic value of women's family roles in the home it attempted to compensate rhetorically, paying tribute to the alleged selflessness, delicacy and intrinsic domesticity of women. (16)

At first, the shift from the domestic to the industrial mode of production was not beneficial to women because by removing the activities from the home it also took women's economic value. Since domestic service such as managing the household, rearing the children and nourishing the family members were not taken as productive work, but as a natural

trait of mothers and wives, women lost their position as men's partners to stand as their dependents. The new economic order affected married women in particular. The autonomy they had while daughters, wage earners and as such contributors to the family budget disappeared as they constituted their own families becoming wives and mothers (TILLY 193). Marriage, therefore, meant a drawback for women's independence and posed a great problem for those who, like Gilman and Schreiner, were not inclined to abdicate either their autonomy or their desire to marry. Only later, by the 1950's, when the industrial development required a large number of women in the marketplace, did they regain their position as economic factors and started slowly to withdraw from the "private sphere" to enter the public one.

A view of the female labor force in the United States from 1820 to 1980 is provided by Lynn Y. Weiner in From Working Girl to Working Mother. She distinguishes two phases within that time span: the first, going from 1820 to 1920 and marked by the presence of single young women in the marketplace she calls "the era of the working girl"; the second, from 1920 to 1980, characterized by the prevalence of married women on the female labour force she names "the era of the working mother". Weiner observes that, although historians usually consider the entrance of women into the marketplace around the mid nineteenth century, they had been working since earlier times. While the bulk of the female labor force was formed by "destitute, black or immigrant" women who were "considered to be beyond the pale of middle class

respectability" (14), the question of working women did not arise much public concern. When white native-born women of middle class families started incorporating that mass, a debate over women's employment and its consequence on American society arose.

By the end of the eighteenth century female idleness was considered a sin and women were not only allowed but also expected to work for economic and moral reasons (WEINER 32). However, by the early nineteenth century, this attitude pro women's employment started changing as the ideology of domesticity became stronger and reinforced women's roles. This ideology maintained that women should be restricted to the domestic realm, rearing the children and performing housework. The exaggerated emphasis placed on women's responsibility in shaping the character of the future citizens resulted in an overvaluation of motherhood and of the preparation for motherhood. As the majority of female workers by this time was of single young women, the subject of public concern became "future motherhood". It was argued by the opposers of female employment that the bad living and working conditions would affect negatively the health and morals of the future mothers, threatening the quality of the next generations and the "middle class ideals of family life" (WEINER 31).

Despite the controversy created around the working girls, the number of "respectable" single and self-supporting women working out and living on their own increased by the second half of the nineteenth century, fostering a debate on women's

behavior. Working women were erroneously referred to as "homeless" or "women adrift", terms applied "to the destitute women of the slums who were literally without a shelter and who slept in police stations, public parks and alleys" (WEINER 36). The ambiguity of the term compromised the real character of the working women implying the idea that they were "on the cutting edge of disrepute" (38). The worst transgression of morality -- prostitution -- was attributed to the working women's vulnerability towards immoral behavior. In fact, prostitution served as an alternative income source for those who could not support themselves with low wages. The routinization of work, which was supposed to alter women's sensibility, loneliness and the lack of domestic influences were also reported as causes of increasing immorality.

The debate over the status of working women and the difficulties found in their working condition, resulted in a process of reevaluation and reform. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a number of ameliorative measures such as "Traveller's Aid Services, boarding homes and recreational programms" were implanted in order to create a domestic atmosphere for the "homeless women", serving at the same time as a means to reinforce domestic values. The improvement of working conditions through laws establishing minimun wages and maximun working hours reflected the preoccupation in protecting future mothers (WEINER 47). These protectionist measures, however, favored basically middle class white women, especially the young and single who worked temporarily before marriage. The black and

poor women continued to be kept on the edge of society. Also the married women did not benefit from the protective legislation, since the main concern of reformers was to protect the physical and moral quality of future mothers. Gradually the group of older married women, already mothers, replaced the young girls as the main source of female labor and consequently they also became the main target on the debate over working women. Whether mothers or girls, the fact was that the last turn of the century witnessed the increase of the number of women in the marketplace.

It was within this period of transformation and redefinition of women's position in society that Gilman and Schreiner lived, and it was this subject that they developed in their polemic prose and fiction. Critics on the economic dependence of women upon men and defenders of the entrance of women into new fields of labor, Gilman and Schreiner undertook in their writings their discontent and their claim on the necessity of social reform. My aim in this study is to observe how they accomplished this. In order to do so I will firstly analyze Gilman's and Schreiner's theoretical books, pointing out their main ideas as to how to achieve social change. Then I will investigate how these ideas are incorporated into their novels as to attain the same effect. I believe that, although they might have followed different ways, both Gilman and Schreiner inserted theoretical questions within their novels through aspects connected to setting, characters and plot.

CHAPTER I

THE THEORETICAL WORKS OF GILMAN AND SCHREINER

To the unaware reader it might seem strange that two women from apparently such different realities have written books so similar in content. But considering the coincidences about these two women's lives and mainly the historical period in which they lived, such a reader would come to the conclusion that Women and Economics, written by Charlotte P. Gilman, and Woman and Labour, written by Olive Schreiner, are in fact two important samples of what most women activists around the world felt at the turn of the century. As B.S. Winkler's study Victorian Daughters: The Lives and Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Olive Schreiner demonstrates, some striking parallels can be traced between Schreiner and Gilman.

Born in 1855 in a remote District of Cape Colony, Olive Schreiner lived a poor childhood and adolescence, moving from one place to another in the British territories of South Africa. Olive's father, Gottlob Schreiner, was a German protestant missionary who went to Africa through the London Missionary Society to "teach the heathen" (3). But because of his "generous, dreamy, naive and impractical" character he lost both his position as head of the Wesleyan Native Training Institute and his ministry, failing therefore in his role as a provider to his family. Olive's mother, Rebecca, was the well-bred daughter of a middle-class English family, who followed her husband with idealistic views of a missionary life. "Proficient in French and Italian, flower painting and music", Rebecca conformed "to the precepts of the cult of the Lady", which expected a woman to be "ornamental, modest, pious and submissive" (3), and tried to raise her children, mainly her daughters, according to the same ideology that shaped her own education. Although Rebecca could not maintain the initial religious ardour which had brought her to Africa, due to the frustrating real conditions of the missionary life, she was firm in her proposal of raising her children "as good Christians", imposing a severe code of discipline and obedience. Her radical attitudes generated a conflictuous relation between mother and daughter, awakening in the sensitive Olive an interest for power relations which would accompany her throughout her life (and which can be seen as the seed of her dedication to the Women's Question).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was born in 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut. Like Olive Schreiner, she also had a problematic childhood. Charlotte's father, Frederik Beecher Perkins, who came from a prominent family in America, was a completely absent figure in Gilman's life. He deserted the family when Charlotte was a little child, leaving them without financial stability or a home. Charlotte, together with her brother and mother, spent her infancy moving repeatedly, living by favor with the Beecher relatives, who regarded them not as real part of the family, but as poor relations (LANE 1990:29). Although Charlotte was deprived of a good formal education and of the rich cultural life that her father's kinsmen led, it was from the Beechers that she inherited her taste for public life and social service and her talent for writing (LANE 1990:30).

As in Schreiner's case, it was through the mother that Gilman's inmost conflicts arose. Mary Perkins, like Rebecca Schreiner, also tried to bring up her daughter according to the ideal of femininity of the 19th century, which was closely related with religious tenets. Gilman resented her mother's arbitrariness and severity in raising her. When Charlotte was thirteen, her mother joined the Swedenborgian household dominated by spiritualists (WINKLER:15). Whether Protestant or Swedenborgian, the blind obedience and submissiveness preached by religious doctrines were unbearable for both Schreiner and Gilman.

Besides the religious environment and exigencies, which Schreiner and Gilman later rejected, they had another important

point in common: the Anglo-American culture of Victorianism. Although they grew up in different surroundings, they were both raised according to the precepts of Victorian Womanhood (1), which delineated the profile of the ideal woman, also called the True Woman.

In order to understand the ideology that shaped women's character in the nineteenth century an overview of Barbara Welter's article "The Cult of True Womanhood" is extremely useful. According to her, the term "True Woman" was thoroughly used in all women's magazines in the mid nineteenth century, as the synonym of a pious, pure, submissive and domestic woman. It was under these four virtues, "the attributes of True Womanhood", that a woman was to judge herself and to be judged by her husband, neighbors and society, as examples taken from nearly all women's magazines published from 1820-1860 amply demonstrate (152).

"Religion or piety was the core of woman's virtues; the source of her strength," afirms Welter (15). It was in religion that women sought spiritual and moral guidance. But the real function of religion in women's lives went beyond that, as the following example shows: "Religion is exactly what a woman needs, for it gives her that dignity that best suits her dependence" (153). It is not difficult to perceive that religion was a strong agent in molding women's character and a main factor in maintaining women's subjugation.

"Purity", continues Welter, "was as essential as piety to a young woman; its absence as unnatural and unfeminine" (154). A

woman who lost her innocence was seen as a "fallen woman" and the punishment, often reported in women's magazines, for such an infraction was madness or death. A woman should keep her "greatest treasure" only to her future husband. And until the wedding night -- "the single great event of her life" --, she was solely responsible for having it intact. As she was considered morally superior, stronger and purer than man, who was believed to have a more sensual nature, she should never give in and risk being "left in silent sadness to bewail [her] credulity, imbecility, duplicity and premature prostitution" (155).

"Submission was perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women", asserts Welter (158), for unlike religiousness and purity, which were also supposed to be part of male character, submission was extolled only in women. The idea of men's superiority over women was strongly linked with religious teachings. It was preached to be heavenly determined that women were the weak, timid, doubtful, inconstant part of humanity, needing therefore the protection of the stronger part, men. The true woman would understand and accept this natural law: "A really sensible woman feels her dependence, she does what she can, but she is conscious of inferiority, and therefore grateful for support" (159). In accepting this fate the Victorian woman relinquished her own self to serve another. What they were not yet aware of (or were afraid to face) was that it was exactly their dependent condition upon man that turned them into weak, rightless and submissive beings, and not the opposite.

"Domesticity", concludes Welter, "was among the virtues most prized by the women's magazines" (162). This is comprehensible since it was within the privacy of home that the other virtues of a true woman were perpetuated: "There is composure at home; there is something sedative in the duties which home involves. It affords security not only from the world but from delusions and errors of every kind" (162). Safe from questioning the moral burden laid upon them and their dependent position, women stayed at home with the task of turning it into a comfortable and lively place. There they were nurses, cooks and cleaners. There they were trained to enjoy needlework and gardening. There they had their leisure activities such as writing letters, singing, playing an instrument and even reading, provided that they did not read dangerous books, i.e., books that could make them skeptical about their position in society. It was also within the "private sphere", performing their roles as wives and mothers, that women would achieve a certain prestige and acquire a little power, for they were responsible for educating the new generations.

Being raised within such strict ideology, it is interesting how Schreiner and Gilman escaped from absorbing and practicing it and, instead, started questioning its validity. Their attitude might have resulted from their observations, already as young girls, of the contradictoriness between what they were taught to be right and the real facts of life. Educated to believe that women were naturally weak and submissive and that their dependence upon men was a god-established and natural

fact, young Olive and Charlotte experienced a quite different situation in their own families. Most of their sufferings in chilhood were due to the fact that their mothers, examples of true women, depended upon poor or absent providers. Soon they realized that the ideology their mothers insisted on infusing them was false and injurious to society. Skepticism on the dependent condition of women in the late nineteenth century and a consequent revolt against the religious code which perpetuated that condition were the beginning of Schreiner's and Gilman's concern about women's problems.

The bulk of their ideas on the Woman's Question is concentrated in their two major theoretical works: Women and Economics (1898) by Charlotte P. Gilman and Woman and Labor (1911) by Olive Schreiner. Both books were hailed as Bibles of the women's movement and influenced many women around the turn of the last century. Appearing in a period when the women's struggle was centered on the fight to win the female suffrage, the polemical prose of Schreiner and Gilman went beyond that question. It contained an analysis of the historical, economic, and social reasons that determined the subjection of women upon men and its implications on social evolution. The fight of Schreiner and Gilman was for a rearrangement of social relations which would result in a better, more egalitarian and just society.

The starting point of both Woman and Labor and Women and Economics is a description of the evolutionary process of humankind to explain how it resulted in the dependence of women upon men. Schreiner does it by referring to the history of human toil. She points out that in the savage era there was no distinction between male and female activities. Hunting and fighting were performed by men and women equally. Both "wandered free together and labored free together" (28). The division of labor started, she says, when mankind ceased wandering and settled to cultivate the land. At this stage, men went out to hunt and fight, and women stayed "home" to perform tasks related to the well being of the family members and to the maintenance of the household. Later on, when fewer men were needed in the hunting and fighting business, women had to withdraw some of their functions to share them with men. While men took over the open air activities, such as the cultivation of the fields and the building of houses, women moved "within the gates" (30), taking care of the family by preparing the food and making clothes, starting an increasing process of sex-function distinction, which culminated with the beginning of the industrial era. Schreiner affirms that if for men industrialization meant a shift from physical to intellectual fields of labor, for women it represented a nearly total suppression "of her ancient domain of productive and social labor" (46).

Even women's roles as educators and child bearers were affected by the turn of the century, states Schreiner. Whereas

in primitive times continuous child bearing was essential to the survival of the race, in Schreiner's day the drop in the infant mortality rate resulted in a decrease of the birth-rate. Also, the earlier demand for women to produce as much labor force as possible diminished as the use of mechanical inventions lessened the need of many workers. Women, thus, were expected to reduce their creative power having only episodal pregnancy (62).

Finally, with the displacement from the household to the factory for the production of goods, such as food and clothes, the woman lost her status as producer and so her economic value. By having her traditional tasks performed by others, she became progressively a mere receptor, making little use of her physical and intellectual powers. The woman was left almost exclusively with her sexual and child bearing function, which she developed until she became dependent on it "for her support" (103). At this point she reached what Schreiner calls "a condition of more or less complete and passive sex-parasitism" (75).

Gilman's description of the evolutionary process of humankind is more aggressive. She attributes the final result of women's subjugation to men to the use of force by the latter. According to Gilman, in primitive times male and female were equally fierce and strong. Males, with added belligerence for sex competition, fought with their opponents to win a female. Although treated as a prize, woman was as independent as he. But, at a certain stage of this process, males realized that it was easier and more appropriate to enslave the female (than to fight with rivals to win her). With the loss of freedom, the

human female found herself in a dependent position. The male assumed the task of providing food and protection, not only to her but also to their offspring. No longer influenced directly by the natural environment, she started being molded by her new environment, the male. Speed, strength, courage and other skills became unnecessary for a dependent female. Now she had to develop sexual qualities in order to increase her power of sex-attraction and thus secure her a provider and protector, warranting her survival. The sexual relation clearly fused with the economic relation. Gilman asserts that the female's state of dependence became gradually sanctioned by law and sanctified by religion through marriage, but that the evil effect of a sex-relation grounded on the economic dependence of one member upon the other remained the same.

Although Schreiner and Gilman focus on different aspects to trace the evolution of the human race, they reach the same conclusion: that this process resulted in an unbalanced relation between man and woman, with the latter economically dependent on the former through the exertion of her sexual functions only. Their next step is to show how harmful to humanity that kind of relation is. Although they use a somewhat different terminology to refer to the relation betweeen the sexes, they touch on very similar points in what regards its evil effects, either in a restricted sphere, the family --, or in a wide one -- society.

Schreiner calls sex-parasitism the condition of female dependence upon the male. She believes that female parasitism goes together with the improvement in the material and social

conditions of life. Throughout the ages, she says, this phenomenon was more easily found among wealthy women, who belonging to a small section of society, represented no real threat. But in her days, the number of parasite women was increasing fast, denoting danger. She attributes this increase in sex-parasitism to two main reasons. First to the process of industrialization and the extensive use of machinery as a means of production, which improved people's living standards creating the ideal condition to develop female parasitism. Second, to the shrinkage of women's productive activities and their exclusion from new fields of labor.

Schreiner considers productive labor not only the work performed outside the home, but also the domestic tasks. A parasite woman, she explains, performs neither work and lives at the expense of a male (husband, father or brother) or through the exertion of her sexual function alone. In this sense, Schreiner does not distinguish a parasite wife from a mistress or prostitute (104). The only differentiating aspect, she ponders, is that the latter "in place of life, is recognized as producing disease and death" (104). Schreiner believes that as soon as women became economically independent by re-assuming their place as productive agents in society, prostitution would come to an end. For Schreiner, prostitution is "all sexual relationship based, not on the spontaneous affection of the woman for the man, but on the necessitous acceptance by woman of material good in exchange for the exercise of her sexual function" (258). In her definition she clearly equates

prostitution to marriage as an economic arrangement.

The woman who depends on the gratification of her sexual function alone, she explains, is dependent on the male's power to support her. She has, therefore, a limited freedom in choosing her partner. The opposite occurs with the man, who holds an advantageous economic position and who, even if not deserving, dominates in the sexual relations impairing the chances of less rich but worthier men. The economic independence of women would, in Schreiner's view, affect positively the relation between the sexes, providing women more freedom of choice, either in the selection of her partner or in the decision to marry or not, and establishing a relative equality of chances between men of securing their desired companion. In other words, it would revert the sexual relation from an economic arrangement to what it essentially is, an affective union.

Regarding family relations, Schreiner claims that the subjugation of women has contributed to a poor motherhood. Schreiner considers most women incompetent in their roles as mothers and educators. The reasons are their limiting dependent condition, their exclusion from public affairs and their restriction to the domestic environment. Although Schreiner upholds the Victorian ideal of a self-sacrificing motherhood and of maternity as the source of women's "general superior virtue" and "deeper moral insight" (179), she tries to enhance this conception by urging mothers to be more participant, self-willed and independent. An intelligent and cultured mother, she

asserts, would have much more to offer her offspring (246) and consequently would do a much better job in forming the future generations. "Only an able and laboring wo manhood can permanently produce an able and laboring manhood" (107) states Schreiner, making it clear that the change for a better society depended primarily of an improved woman and mother. This change should inevitably start within women's first, if not only, sphere of action, the home, and then be extended to a broader sphere, society.

Schreiner points out, as a general result of sex-parasitism, "a decay in vitality and intelligence of the female, followed after a longer or shorter period by that of her male descendants and of her entire society" (77). It is for the sake of the "entire society," the whole race, that she pleads for the extinction of sex-parasitism. The solution is to give women alternative fields of labor. This according to her is "our Woman's Right!" (65). The claim for labor is a constant demand of Schreiner's contemporaries and it lies at the base of the first great wave of the Woman's Movement.

Schreiner devotes a whole chapter of Woman and Labor to the analysis of the Woman's Movement of her time. She describes it as "a movement steady and persistent in one direction, the direction of increased activity and culture and towards the negation of all possibility of parasitism in the human female" (142). It is the women's persistence to continue fighting for their reintegration into productive labor -- even knowing that their attitude may lead them to self-sacrifice, sexual isolation

and renunciation of motherhood and parasite marriages -- that gives the Woman's Movement a religious tone and binds women of any "race, class and nation" around the same aims (129).

Schreiner attributes the origin of the W.L.M. to the wealthy and intellectual women who felt most deeply the problems caused by their dependence. These and any other woman engaged in changing her position in society by enlarging her fields of action were usually known as "the New Woman". This term, which had become "trendy" by the turn of the nineteenth century and was frequently misused by the opposers of women's emancipation, meant according to Schreiner a very old concept of Womanhood. The New Woman, she clarifies for the incredulous, is of that "old Teutonic Womanhood, which twenty centuries ago plowed its march through European forests and morasses beside its male companion" (148). Being one of those, Schreiner continues her definition of a New Woman:

> We have in us the blood of a Womanhood that was never bought and never sold; that wore no veil, and had no foot bound; whose realized ideal of marriage was sexual companionship and an equality in duty and labor; who stood side by side with the males they loved in peace or war; and whose children, when they had borne them, sucked manhood from their breasts, and even through their fetal existence heard a brave heart beat above them (148).

Schreiner often uses the expression "Virile woman" to refer to the New Woman. For her, virility as a synonym of strength, courage, energy, is not an exclusively male quality, but a human feature.

The virile women, the new women of the early 20th century, are those ready to give up the commodities of a parasitic life and fight for the women's readaptation into society. Schreiner believes that a real change in this direction will necessarily imply the entrance of women into the marketplace. Maternity, she affirms, should not be used as an excuse to bar women from taking part in productive labor. Throughout the ages, she argues, women have concomitanly toiled hard and performed their child-bearing function. It is unfair, now that human labor is lighter, to suggest that "child bearing is enough for her share in life's labor" (215). Besides, with the power of procreation reduced and restricted to the group of fertile married women (since millions of women like the unmarried and the prostitutes were compelled to have no children at all), it is a misstatement to allege that "the main and continuous occupation of all women from puberty to age is the bearing and suckling of children, and that this occupation must fully satisfy all her needs for social labor and activity" (62-63).

Schreiner advocates that women are apt to act in every new field of labor provided that they are properly instructed and trained. A strong critic of the division of labor based on sexual distinctions, Schreiner argues that what matters is the brain, not the muscles, and that there is no scientific proof that the brain of a woman differs from that of a man. The professional preferences of men and women occur spontaneously. Therefore, she defends, there is no need in creating laws delimiting individual choices. "We take all labor for our

province!" (172), emphasizes Schreiner to those who believe that women are doomed to certain occupations. What she claims is for equal opportunities, intellectual conditions and training. "Throw a puppy into the water", she addresses those skeptical of women's competence, "if it swims well; if it sinks well; but do not tie a rope round its neck and weight it with a brick and then assert its incapacity to keep afloat" (172).

The entrance of women into new fields of labor, concludes Schreiner, instead of creating a gap between man and woman, approximates them. The New Woman is not alone in her desire to reform society, she claims; besides her stands the "New Man" (267). The excessive attention placed upon the New Woman, compared to the relative indifference bestowed upon the New Man is, according to Schreiner, the result of the great resistance women have always had to face at "any attempt at change or readaptation" (267). However, she insists, the New Man is her companion, sharing with her the new ideals of man, woman, parenthood, marriage and society.

It becomes clear that Schreiner does not preach a severance between the sexes and does not blame man solely for the disadvantageous position of women. This aspect of her theory has been constantly pointed out as a failure by many feminist critics. Nevertheless, it shows Schreiner's real concern for a social reform which would benefit women as well as men. Her reluctance to attribute to men all the evils present in social relations reflects her complexity rather than a radicalism usually noticed in other feminists. Schreiner is aware that the

bonds between men and women are contradictory ones -- bonds of oppression and of love -- and that they represent the main difficulty in solving the woman's question.

About forty years later Simone de Beauvoir would use the same argument to explain the complicated relation between the sexes. In her book **The Second Sex** she states that, unlike the negroes and the poor people, examples of oppressed race and class, women could not revolt and break totally with their oppressor, because from their relationship depended the perpetuation of the species. Echoing Schreiner's voice, Simone de Beauvoir concludes by saying that women are linked to men not only through oppression, but through love as well.

Schreiner is also conscious that most women themselves have helped to maintain their oppressive situation by exercizing their power over weaker women, as her own mother and elder sister did with her, or by serving an ideology that made them inferior human beings. Winkler suggests that this insight arose Schreiner's contradictory fellings of hate as well as love towards her own sex (12). Schreiner's awareness that women are the main, if not the sole, agents in achieving their freedon, and that their struggle must start internally, led her to write in one of her letters. "It is not against man we have to fight but against ourselves within ourselves" (quoted in WINKLER 53).

Gilman's arguments to show the damage of women's subjugation to the human race resemble those posed by Schreiner. However, Gilman's theory becomes more palpable, as she presents

practical solutions to reform society by extinguishing a human relation that combines sexual and economic functions and which she refers to as a "sexuo-economic relationship". According to Gilman, as any other species, human beings undergo two natural processes -- one of self-preservation, the other of race-preservation. She explains that, in the first, "natural selection" acts upon the individuals to assure their survival and that, in the second, "sexual selection" is what will guarantee the preservation of the species. Therefore, the individual is modified by its environment under natural selection as well as by "its mate under sexual selection". This implies a very peculiar situation in regard to the human species, asserts Gilman in **Women and Economics**. Since man has become woman's economic environment, as pointed out in the description of the evolutionary process, he has also become "the strongest modifying force in her economic condition" (38). For the human female, natural and sexual selection became inseparable. The blending of sexual and economic function, states Gilman, resulted in the overdevelopment of female sex-distinction which is "not only a means of attracting a mate", but also "a means of getting her livelihood" (38). The excess in sex distinction is a primary evil to the evolution of the race, for it weakens humanity. Gilman asserts that besides physical aspects, male and female of any species present some psychical characteristics which distinguish one from the other. She believes that an intense "maternal passion", "a modesty and timidity" and a "tendency to protect and provide for" in

females, and a belligerent and dominant nature and a "tendency to fight" in males are natural sex-distinctions. But the excess in this feature, she alerts, makes humans over-sexed. Women are far more over-sexed than men because their dependent condition has fostered the development of their sexual rather than their racial qualities.

Throughout the ages, Gilman states, women have been regarded purely as sex, instead of as a human being. The merit of the Woman's Movement of the nineteenth century, she claims, is that it has called people's attention to the overlooked fact that "women are persons as well as females" (49). And as such, argues Gilman, they are able to engage in any "race function" considered male prerrogative, such as economic, scientific, political, cultural and religious activities. The process of differentiation which starts in early childhood and classifies human functions, attitudes and activities as masculine or feminine is not fair, explains Gilman, because "most human attributes" are considered solely masculine. Gilman is aware that a long, slow and hard process is required to prove that "human work is woman's as well as men's". Unfortunately, she laments, women are still over-sexed.

Although a growing number of women in Gilman's day were beginning to change this feature by achieving economic independence, the truth, she admits, is that women's economic profit is still closely related with her power of sex-attraction. While man has opportunity to try to achieve what he wants through varied ways, woman is still doomed to achieve

wealth, power, social distinction, fame and even a home and happiness, comfort and food, through a "small gold ring" (71). The pressure for a girl to marry, says Gilman, is in its extreme sense, one of survival. Contratictorily, however, she must behave as though she did not desire it. She must not act in order to secure it, but wait passively until she is chosen. Since marriage means support, an honorable woman must not ask a man for it. Nevertheless, if she fails to get a provider she is despised, for she proves her "lack of sex-value" (90) and her inability to attract a male. In simple terms, Gilman exposes the hypocrisy that involves the human relationship from courtship to marriage, due to the combination of two distinct affairs -- the sexual and the economic.

The sarcastic attitude towards unmarried women changes as they advance in economic independence, since to be unmarried may no longer mean a failure but an option. Gilman believes that the growing number of women who prefer their independence to a home and a husband proves that "only dependence forced them [into] marriage" (91). Like Schreiner, Gilman concludes that the economic independence of women would result in the reduction of mercenary marriages and in the increase of unions accomplished by true love.

Gilman's opinion also coincides with Schreiner's when she views prostitution as a result of the sexuo-economic relation. This unnatural process, she claims, fosters sex-indulgence mainly in males and leads us to accept prostitution as a "social necessity" (28). In her analysis, Gilman sees the pre-marital

period, while men are not yet prepared to assume the support of another being, as propicious for keeping "temporary and promiscuous sex-relations" (28). She condemns prostitution as the violation of natural laws, which rest on a more permanent mating, proved beneficial to children and to the improvement of the species. But she seems less concerned than Schreiner about the implications of prostitution as a sexuo-economic relation in itself and of prostitutes as women dependent on the only function left to them -- the sexual -- to earn their living. Also she does not develop, as Schreiner does, the question of mercenary marriages as a form of prostitution. Nevertheless, Gilman goes deeper in her analysis of marriage as an institution and of the woman's roles within it.

In Gilman's day the general rule in the economic relation between man and woman determined that men were the producers and distributors of wealth, while women were mere receptors (9). The commonly accepted idea that women received their "share" of the world's wealth as wives or mothers conveyed the image of marriage as a "partnership" (10). Gilman does not comply with this belief. She does not consider a real partnership a relation in which the woman contributes with conditions to stimulate man's productivity instead of contributing with capital, experience or labor as man does. Her target, in fact, is to question women's economic independence in such a relation. For Gilman, one is economically independent when there is a balance between what one gets and what one gives. In this sense, she asks, what does a woman give to receive her share? And does her

contribution confer her her independence? Surely not, she answers. If the work women perform at home, if their role as house servants were regarded as economically valuable, women would in fact be "economic factors in society" (13). But housework is viewed as women's sheer duty, not as productive labor. Moreover, observes Gilman, the theory that women earn their living through domestic service is put down by the fact that the woman who toils more is the one less rewarded, the poorer.

Gilman believes that women will only achieve economic autonomy when they break free of their domesticity, stop making of their homes their marketplace, and engage in real public economic activities (152). For Gilman, the home in its conventional structure is a limiting place for women. "Only as we live, think, feel and work outside the home," she asserts, "do we become humanly developed, civilized, socialized" (222). Within the home, she argues, women have no chance to exercise their human faculties as producers. A solution she poses for a possible change involves the rearrangement of family relations and the profissionalization of domestic labor. She suggests, for example, that some domestic tasks, as well as the education of children, should be accomplished outside the home by trained specialists. She considers an absurd wastefulness the work perfomed isolatedly by one or more women in each household. Probably concerned about the increasing number of wage earning women who had families but resented the difficulties of leading a professional life, Gilman imagines a new living style in which

the spacial rearrangement of the home would be essential for fairer sexual and human relations.

Gilman idealizes a collective residential building formed by kitchenless apartments where housework would be socialized. Food could be prepared by professionals in a common kitchen and served to the families in their own places or in a common dining room. All the domestic service would be done by efficient workers hired by the manager of the establishment. The assistance to the children in a day nursery and kindergarten would be under the responsibility of well trained professionals. Gilman's suggestion seems, in fact, to meet the necessities of working women, for they would have material conditions to work out and also enjoy the warmth of a home. The only aspect Gilman seems to have overlooked is that this project would affect a small portion of society, that which could support it. In other words, she seems to have thought only about the upper and middle-class working women. The women of poor classes would have to continue finding their own ways to cope with their professional and familiar demands.

Although this somewhat different version of our present apartment-hotels might seem strange for us today, the idea of an alternative dwelling-place for groups of families combining private and collective spaces remounts to the very beginning of the nineteenth century. In Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism Polly Wynn Allen reports briefly the many residential experiments held by the American "material feminists" influenced by the first idealists of

"socialized architecture": Welshman Robert Owen and Frenchman Charles Fourier (20). Material feminist, she explains, is a term used to refer to those who "proposed material solutions involving both economic and spatial change", as a way to extinguish, or at least minimize the inequality of sex relations. They campaigned for the abolition of isolated single-family household, with its system of private domestic housework, which they believed maintained women as isolated, unpaid servants impeding their economic and social emancipation.

The idea of socializing domestic work was popularized thoroughly by utopian novelists, who portrayed fictional cities in the moulds of those imagined by material feminists, with kitchenless houses and a system of collective facilities. The most influential novel was **Looking Backward**, by Edward Bellamy, which according to Polly Wynn Allen "launched a major middle-class socialist movement" after its publication in 1888. Gilman was strongly influenced by Bellamy, as well as by other materialist feminists, such as Melusina Fay Pierce, who complained that "Gilman had stolen her ideas" (Cf. HYDEN 417). Nevertheless, Gilman developed a theory of her own, going further in her analysis of the implications of "primitive home" for women and for the social evolution.

One of these implications bears relation to the role of women as mothers. The relationship between the mother and her offspring was of utmost importance for the accomplishment of social reform, asserts Gilman. As Schreiner, Gilman also believed that women were the makers of men, and therefore,

primarily responsible for any change. Motherhood, however, was constantly used as a justification for women's subjugation. Gilman argues that instead of proving itself advantageous to maternity, the economic dependence of women interferes negatively in its process, fostering a "pathological motherhood." She claims that the segregation of women into sex-functions deprives them of developing other human qualities and makes them "too female for perfect motherhood" (182). Like Schreiner, Gilman thought that women were unprepared to perform maternal duties because they lacked "the necessary knowledge of the world" (189). To rely solely on natural maternal instinct and love to achieve the purpose of motherhood, which is "to leave in the world a creature better than its parent" (179), is a serious error, states Gilman. Women need more than that to be efficient mothers and improve the human race. In a sense, Gilman views motherhood as a profession that should be performed by skilled and instructed women. In fact she believes that the education of children would be better accomplished by specialists in child-care centers where the child would acquire a sense of collectivity s/he did not have at home. For Gilman, full-time motherhood fosters individualism, which should be eliminated at its root.

Gilman conceives the idea of a perfect civilization as one measured by social development and cooperation among individuals and where the individual interest is subordinated to the social interest. Higher collectivity, affirms Gilman, will only be possible when the family no longer reproduces the sexuo-economic

relationship and women become free, achieving their importance as economic and social factors. A change in this direction, she says, "is not one merely to be prophesied and recommended: it is already taking place under the forces of social evolution" (122). In a discourse that reminds that of Schreiner's, Gilman states that this change is not caused by theorists and intellectuals, but that it results from a spontaneous process springing out of real necessity for change.

The industrial development of the early 20th century played an essential part in that process. It broke down the familiar structure as an economic unit establishing a new economic pattern. In the industrial period women started leaving their homes to engage in paid activities, experimenting a new feeling of independence (152) and discovering their capacity of self-expression. Gilman is conscious that the new economic position of women affects family relations. However, she argues, it does not affect the true bonds, only those "sub-relations" which should in fact disappear. By "sub-relations" Gilman means the early notions of family ties based on submissiveness, conformity and dependency. The alterations brought by the economic independence of women are beneficial for the individual and for the race, asserts Gilman. The argument used by the opposers of women's emancipation that they are losing their femininity and becoming "unsexed" by performing masculine functions is senseless, refutes Gilman. The error consists in assuming that "race functions, are masculine". The truth, she continues, is that the woman of her time, the so called "New Woman", is

superior to that of the past: "She has more functions, can do more things, is a more highly specialized organism, has more intelligence" and is no less female than the "old" (160). Gilman's concern is with those weak, little women "with the aspiration of an affectionate guinea pig" (168), who oppose the advancement of their own sex. But in spite of them, concludes Gilman, women are undeniably developing as human beings.

In this process of human growth women were experiencing new forms of organization and developing a feeling of union that resulted in the establishment of many Women's Clubs at the turn of the last century. In them, States Gilman, reigns "the spirit of women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell" as well as of all the women who endured self-sacrifice in the name of the Woman's Question. These precursors of the Women's Movement are described by Gilman in the same way as Schreiner did, as martyrs. However, Gilman's tone is different from Schreiner's. Whereas Gilman sounds usually positive and optimistic about the women's perspective towards emancipation and presents solutions, impractical and utopic as they might be, Schreiner's realistic personality makes her more skeptical and careful in her analysis of women's subjugation, an attitude which prevents her from providing concrete solutions. Despite these differences Schreiner and Gilman were the real "spokeswomen" of their contemporaries.

The basic difference between Gilman's and Schreiner's personalities, namely the optimism of the first as opposed to the pessimism of the second, which subtlely appears in their

polemic prose, will clearly be noticed in their fictional work. In the analysis of Gilman's and Schreiner's novels I will demonstrate how they managed to use fiction as a vehicle to disclose their ideas and as a means to incite social reform by changing people's mentality. As I did with the theoretical works, I chose the most representative novel of each writer, Gilman's **Herland** and Schreiner's **The Story of an African Farm**, to illustrate this connection between theory and fiction. Three aspects are to be investigated in their novels. First, I will deal with the setting, observing its importance and function in each novel. Then, I will focus my analysis on the main female and male characters. Finally, I will approach the conflict presented in each plot, considering its origin as well as the way it is solved. In this way, I intend to explore how Gilman and Schreiner portray the familiar and social relations between the sexes, having in mind their theoretical view on this subject.

CHAPTER II

A SAMPLE OF GILMAN'S FICTION - HERLAND

Carl Degler's reference to Gilman as "the major intellectual leader of the struggle for women's rights (...) during the first two decades of the twentieth century" (22) leads us to think of her as a militant feminist. Gilman, however, found the term "humanist" as most appropriate to describe her activities as a free thinker, writer and social reformer. Her status as leader was a result not only of her "unconmmon intelelctual power and insight" (21), as Degler describes, but also of her capacity to produce and her ability to write. For Frances Bartkowski "Gilman's productivity as a writer and lecturer was prodigious" (24). Women and Economics, for instance, was written only within a few weeks (HILL 503). Besides this most famous book of hers, Gilman wrote five other

theoretical books, a volume of poetry, two volumes of fiction, an autobiography published after her death in 1935, and The Forerunner, a montly magazine written entirely by her and published for seven years (DEGLER 22). According to Ann J. Lane all the issues of The Forerunner correspond to "twenty-eight full lenght books" (1979:vi).

It was into The Forerunner that Gilman inserted her utopian novel Herland. Lane states that Gilman viewed both her theoretical and fictional work "as intrinsic to her struggle to persuade her audience, primarily but not entirely women, of the value and possibility of her world view" (1990:290). If in her polemic prose Gilman tries to reach the readers' consciousness appealing to their reason, in her fiction she resorts to their imagination to attain the same aim. By dramatizing her vision of history, sociology and ethics (1990:290), Gilman subtly makes her proposal of social transformation. The literary genre that best suited Gilman's intention was the utopian fiction. It was this genre that she chose to write her most famous novel Herland (1915), which together with Moving the Mountain (1911) and With Her in Ourland (1916) form the trilogy serialized in The Forerunner.

The boom of utopian literature around the second half of the nineteenth century is related to the transformations society had been witnessing by then. The utopian socialism which has fostered a number of movements concerned with alternative communities in the United States by the early and mid nineteenth century also served as an inspiring source for the production of

fantastic fiction (GUBAR 95). Although the dominion of men regarding literary utopia is usually taken for granted, due, perhaps, to the fame achieved by some male writers with their utopian novels, such as Samuel Butler and his **Erewhon** and **Erewhon Revisited** (1872 and 1901), Edward Bellamy with **Looking Backward** (1888) and Willian Morris with **News From Nowhere** (1890), Nam Bowman Albinski argues in her article "Utopia Reconsidered" that "the major bibliography of women utopian writers lists 51 titles from 1870 to 1919" (830). The reason why literary utopias produced by women were overlooked might lie in the fact that most of them were mere fictional descriptions of idealized communities and not "a self-consciously feminist utopia" (LANE 1979:xix) as **Herland** was. For Albinski, the utopian genre served as an instrument for feminist writers to criticize the established social, political and economic arrangements and to disclose their claims for change by creating an "ideal world where women share power and authority, where women are economically independent and in control of their own sexual lives and reproductive systems" (830). Albinski states that "Gilman based her fictional utopias on her own explicit social and political critique" (831). In fact **Herland** is a fictionalized version of the ideas Gilman developed in her theoretical works. However, Gilman's proposal of a new society is facilitated in **Herland** by the freedom of creation permitted within the utopian genre.

Herland, as the title suggests, depicts a society inhabited only by women, which is visited by three American men. The

speculations and expectations of the male characters in relation to that peculiar place convey their negative or romanticized view on women in general. Terry O. Nicholson expects to find a completely disorganized and primitive society; Jeff Margrave imagines "a nunnery under an abbess -- a peaceful, harmonious sisterhood", while Vandijck Jennings believes in a matriarchate where men -- "less socially developed" -- pay them an annual visit for reproduction (8). All three, however, are quite sure that such a place cannot exist without men, mainly after their first visual contact from a biplane, when they conclude that the land is a civilized one. Their first impressions are of "a land in a state of perfect cultivation, where even the forests looked as if they were cared for" and the towns, carefully planned and beautifully adorned with flowers and fountains, have no dirt, no smoke, no noise.

Gilman envisioned a place created by women as a perfect one, without the drawbacks of a real city, without the things she condemned in real life, a place "too pretty to be true" (19). In Herland instead of small private houses as in our cities, there are "palaces grouped among parks and open squares, something as college buildings" and the "pleasant sense of home" pervading all over (19). The spacial arrangements of Herland are a picture of Gilman's theory of kitchenless houses and community facilities. Indeed, the greatest difference one encounters when reading the novel is between the highly developed sense of community of Herlanders compared to one's exaggerated individualism.

Community feeling in Herland is so strong that psychology is a science that goes together with history, not with personal life. The women of Herland usually talk in we's instead of I's even in the most personal occasions. When Ellador, one of the main female characters, apologizes to Van, the male protagonist and narrator, his reaction is of both perplexity and admiration:

> -- "we" and "we" and "we" -- it was so hard to get her to be personal. And as I thought that, I suddenly remembered how we were always criticizing our women for being so personal. (126)

The geographical characteristics of Herland as well as its history have helped to shape the country and its people in the "harmonious sisterhood" found by the three men. The land about the size of Holland stands in very high altitude and has remained naturally isolated from the rest of the world for two thousand years. It has a first-rate climate and a most fertile soil, perfect for cultivation. Before being separated, Herland was a country like any other. "They had ships, commerce, an army, a king"; they were a "polygamous and slave-holding people" (54). But as it happens to many other nations, Herland faced a series of historic misfortunes. Decimated by war, its people found refuge in this hinterland protected by natural defences. The only passage left, however, was filled up with volcanic lava while the whole army was fighting to protect the pathway. Very few men survived, save the slaves, who took the chance to revolt killing the remaining men -- old masters and young boys -- old

women and the mothers. The slaves intended to form a new country with the young women and girls. But these "infuriated virgins" could not bear such suffering and "instead of submitting, rose in sheer desperation and slew their brutal conquerors" (55). These ancestresses of Herland would have been doomed to race extinction were it not for a miracle, "a gift from the gods" to the Mother of a New Race: the power to beget without men, through parthenogenesis. This virgin mother of future Herland bore five girls, who inherited the power and transmitted it to the next generation.

Descending from a single mother, and therefore from an only family, Herlanders have developed a feeling of maternal and sisterly love which has served as the basis for such a fair society. Gilman's belief in "the subordination of individual effort for individual good to the collective effort for the collective good" (1911:102) as essential to social evolution pervades the whole novel. While in her theoretical work she admits that this subordination does not fully occur in our societies, due in part to sexual and economic structures, in her fiction she allows herself to put her theory into practice by inventing a world where the only existing relationship is one of mutual love and cooperation between women. In Herland there is no individual interest, but a collective concern for improvement and growth. To Herlanders

> the country was a unit -- it was theirs. They themselves were a unit, a conscious group; they thought in terms of the community. As such, their time-sense was not limited to the hopes and

> ambitions of an individual life. Therefore, they habitually considered and carried out plans for improvement which might cover centuries. (79)

Growth, which is Gilman's motto in her theory, becomes a word of order in Herland. "The conscious effort to make it better" (76) usually leads the women of Herland to achieve perfection.

"Perfect" is, in fact, one of the adjectives most often applied by the narrator to describe Herland. Everything there is superior, faultless. The garments they wear and which the intruders have to adopt are extremely simple and practical and absolutely comfortable (26); the room where they are settled is high and wide, beautiful in proportion, in colour, in smooth simplicity; the long, broad and smooth bed is perfect with its finest linen (24); the breakfast provided is sufficient in amount and excellent in quality (27). Their language, which the men learned within a few months, "was not hard to speak, smooth and pleasant to the ears, and easy to read and write" (31) with its absolutely phonetic system. The excellence of Herland is better noticed by the men when, after a frustrated attempt at escaping, they are escorted to the place where they were first kept. By that time, they could see in detail part of the country with its "perfect roads, as dustless as a swept floor" (43) with trees and flowers alongside them, and the parklike beauty of the villages and towns.

Another conspicuous feature of Herland is "the perfection of its food supply" (77). Since they have decided to raise no cattle for lack of space, they depend exclusively on the soil as

their source of food. They have created therefore "a perfect scheme of refeeding the soil with all that came out of it" (80) improving agriculture to its highest point. "The deliberate replanting of an entire forest area with different kinds of trees" (79) is also a common practice in Herland which caused much surprise among the visitors.

All this high level of accomplishment results from years of hard work and dedication to the collectivity. To guarantee the most perfect living conditions to the population of Herland it has been necessary to establish a limit to it. Instead of five children, as it happened in the beginning, each mother is expected to have an only child. To avoid further pregnancies the mother-to-be deliberately engages herself in the most active physical and mental work and in the direct care and service of the babies already born in order to put the child-longing out of her mind. The quality of the population has been also worked out by training and breeding out the lowest types. The girls showing bad qualities are asked to renounce motherhood and those who insist on their rights can bear the child but not educate it. Education in Herland is a task entrusted only to the best fit (83). Their system of child rearing is also a perfect one since children are visibly happy and healthy, intelligent and kind. Their method is so irreproachable that in Herland children hardly ever cry.

Naturally the people of Herland, i.e., the women, are as perfect as the environment they have created. Physically they are tall, strong, healthy, agile and beautiful as a race;

mentally they are intelligent, wise and extremely reasonable. They are also described as sweet, patient, generous and modest, and referred to by the narrator as wonder-women and super-women (117). The environment of Herland has definitely contributed to eliminating all the bad qualities, all the vices from the character of these women. Once there are no men, no sexual-economic relationship, there is also no reason for competitiveness, personal interest, jealousy and none of those excessive sex-distinctions so common in the women of our society and which Gilman so vehemently criticized in her polemic prose.

As Lefanu points out, the separatist feature of Herland is essential to the changes Gilman envisioned since only "a separatist world allows women physical freedom, access to the public world, and the freedom to express love for other women" (55). Surely such a society would not exist in the way it is portrayed had the place not been isolated and had nature not acted upon those women granting them the possibility to perpetuate the race. Nevertheless, the same society would not exist if the women in it had not developed in the direction they did, as conscious human beings. This is the point Ann J. Lane makes in her introduction to Herland. To her "Gilman's concern (...) is primarily with human consciousness -- what the people will look like and do, how and why they are different and better. The physical world is a natural creation of these new people" (1979:xxi). Therefore, she concludes, Gilman is free to create a society that harmonizes high technology and scientific knowledge with a natural and simple way of life (xii). In a way,

Lane provides an excuse for the blank spaces Gilman leaves in the explanation of some basic points regarding setting. One of them is the lack of information about the process of industrialization in Herland. We know that they are highly advanced, but we know nothing about their sources of energy their raw materials, their anti-polluting systems. The setting, in this sense, is less important than the characters, through which Gilman operates her main purpose -- to change people's consciousness.

The characters in Herland are before anything Gilman's spokespersons. Her ideas on social reform and about a new mentality are reproduced in the dialogues and in the musings of the narrator. The didatic feature of the utopian genre is, therefore, present throughout the novel. The female characters as a group embody Gilman's conception of the New Woman. In the words of Van, the narrator: "They were not pets. They were not servants. They were not timid, inexperienced, weak" (141). As previously commented on, the women of Herland are models of highly developed human beings, be it in the physical, intellectual or spiritual and moral aspect. Although Gilman exaggerates in tracing the profile of Herlanders as faultless women, her approach leads the reader to wonder how the female character would in fact develop under the conditions found in Herland. Gilman provides her view, but her main intention is to foster the reader to think about the subject. The women of Herland are what Gilman believes every woman can be -- a fully developed human being. The point she repeatedly makes in the

novel is that in Herland women are persons besides being females. They have not developed those sex-distinction so naturally acquired in a bisexual society and which, being artificially evolved, reduce women to their-sex-function only. In Herland women have made history, have built the country, have created religion and established the rules of sociability. In short, they are the world.

There are six main female characters in the novel. They are Somel, Zava and Moadine, Van's, Jeff's and Terry's tutors; and Ellador, Celis and Alima, the men's future wives. The first three are in charge of teaching the visitors their language and of educating them. They are also responsible for getting as much information as possible about the rest of the world and divulging it to the whole nation. It is through them that the reader becomes acquainted with Herland in practical terms. These tutors, especially Somel, explain how everything works in Herland. Their function is basically to establish, together with the male characters, a kind of cultural interchange through which the reader makes a parallel between the utopian world of Herland and his/her own real world, measuring the positive and negative aspects of each. Their performance is chiefly didactic. Of all the issues they discuss, the educational system of Herland and the sacralization of motherhood are the most important ones because they summarize what Gilman considers the basic factors for social transformation.

Motherhood in Herland has turned into a kind of religion, described by the narrator as "a sort of Maternal Pantheism"

(59). It has become the women's main concern: "By Motherhood they were born and by motherhood they lived -- life was, to them, just the long cycle of motherhood" (59). There is, however, a clear and fundamental distinction between bearing and rearing a child, and the latter, in Herland, exceeds the former in importance. Believing that real growth is achieved through education, Herland mothers as "Conscious Makers of People" are willing to share the care and education of their babies with women they know to be wiser and more skilled. Like a dentist's work, the rearing of children is considered a highly specialized craft, and as such it is not open to any woman, any mother, but only to the best fit. By using Somel's voice Gilman exposes her belief on the incompetence of most women as mothers and on the need of educating those who are not prepared or inclined to fulfill such a supreme task (83).

Gilman also approaches the theme of individualism versus collectivism through Somel. When she explains to Van how education is accomplished in Herland, Somel discloses Gilman's ideas on the negative effects of rearing children isolatedly, fostering in them selfishness, and on the superiority of rearing them in child-care centers, where in contact with other children they would develop a sense of community essential to their improvement as a human being. In Herland Gilman creates an opportunity to show how the collective spirit works in practical terms. Children are not individual belongings of their mothers. They are, instead, treasures of the whole nation. Mothers, in their turn, consider all children as their own daughters, loving

and serving them all equally. The children in Herland are educated in groups, without schooling, without knowing that they are being educated. Education there aims at developing in children "a clear far-reaching judgement and a strong well-used will" (106) preparing them for citizenship. Although the educational system of Herland seems to eliminate personal differences by stressing commmon interests, its inhabitants still keep their own individuality. A clear example of this are the three girls who first meet the Americans. Celis is described as a "blue-and-and-rose person" who attracts Jeff's romantic and idealistic character. Alima is seen as "black-and-white-and-red, a blazing beauty". She is the fearless girl who defies Terry from the beginning, rousing his interest and sharpening his male instinct. Finally Ellador is the brown girl whose curious and scientific mind identifies perfectly with Van's rational character.

While the three girls, however, share common character traits, the men on their turn, diverge significantly. Gilman intentionally puts together representatives of three distinct male reactions towards woman. Jeff stands for those who unquestionably support the women's movement for emancipation or the equality between the sexes, although he still maintains a romanticized idea about them. He is the perfect gentleman, "full of chivalry and sentiment" (9). He is always enthusiastic about everything he sees in Herland and adapts himself quickly and thoroughly to what he considers to be a lost paradise. Terry is Jeff's opposite. He represents those who do not believe in the

potentialities of women while human beings, those who view women as mere performers of sexual functions, as purely females. With a practical and prejudicious mind, Terry divides women into two categories -- "those he wanted and those he didn't" (21). In a way he stands for man in his early stage, the fighter, adventurer and conqueror guided by his male instincts. Finally, Van portrays the skeptical and inquiring kind, those who are not totally closed to new ideas but who need to be convinced with reasonable and irrefutable proofs. He is the one who thinks and acts rationally, not passionately like Terry nor sentimentally like Jeff. It is through him that we are told the story which he wrote from memory. Initially doubting the possibility of a civilized woman's land, he is eventually convinced not only of its existence but also of its superiority over a bisexual world.

The male characters, especially Van, also serve Gilman's didactic purpose. In Van's observations and considerations about Herland, Gilman inserts her own point of view, her position on the issues discussed. Echoing, for instance, the theory in which she condemned the interference of purchasing power on sexual relations fostering mercenary marriages, Van states that "When a man has nothing to give a woman, is dependent wholly on his personal attraction, his courtship is under limitations" (89). On another occasion, in a conversation where the men are trying to explain what the American women do all the time at home, Van comments that Alima, Ellador and Celis "soon wrung from us the general fact that those women who had the most children had the least servants, and those who had the most servants had the

least children (97), emphasizing Gilman's theory that the women who toil more are the least rewarded.

Van's description of the religion in Herland also reproduces Gilman's idea of how religion should act upon people. Convinced that religion was ill-used because not directed to improve life on earth, but to prepare people for death, Gilman creates in Herland an applied religion, a religion that is fulfilled not through rituals or "divine service", but through everything they do. "Their cleanliness, their health, their exquisite order, the rich peaceful beauty of the whole land, the happiness of the children, and above all the constant progress they made -- all this was their religion" (114-115).

Gilman's obsession with progress and development, which in Women and Economics she defines as "the duty of human life" (207), in Herland is incorporated into their religion. As Van observes, "they had no theory of the essential opposition of good and evil; life to them was growth; their pleasure was in growing, and their duty also" (102).

Nevertheless, overt didacticism is not the only strategy Gilman uses to convey her ideas and to urge her readers to carry on social change: she also resorts to comic relief. "The power of humor as a device for social criticism," states Lane, "has only now been recognized by the Women's Movement" (1979:4). Gilman, however, seemed to be aware of such power when writing Herland. She uses this technique very efficiently when approaching in the novel serious issues unfolded in her non-fictional work. By creating a set of female characters

completely alienated from the arrangements of a sexual world, Gilman fosters funny situations where the sharp-witted and curious women unintentionally embarass the proud men with their simple child like questions.

One of such situations occurs when the conversation is about methods of reproduction and Zava inquires about the meaning of the term "virgin". After hearing that "among mating animals, the term virgin is applied to the female who has not mated", she innocently asks: "Oh. I see. And does it apply to the male also? Or is there a different term for him?" (45). The men, naturally, evade giving a detailed answer. Another quite funny episode happens when the men are explaining to their future wives why they should take their husbands' names. "Do your women have no names before they are married?" (45) reacts Celis. Learning that their maiden names are changed for the husband's, she retorts: "Change them? Do the husbands then take the wive's maiden names?" (118) Some touches of humour are also found in the discussion about religion between Van and Ellador. On the personification of God Ellador explains that Herlanders "do not assume a Big Woman somewhere who is God" and innocently asks Van: "Is your god a Big Man?". His answer: "Yes, a man with whiskers" (113).

Gilman makes Terry a particularly funny character. With his deeply established sexist view of the world, Terry, although constantly making fun of Herland and its women, is the one most ridiculed throughout the novel. It is indeed funny when he refers to the old but vigorous women of Herland as "a regiment

of old colonels" (20) or as "a lot of elderly lady acrobats" (32); when he remarks that he "can almost call them feminine when [he] sees them knit" (31); when he asks his friends to confound the women's "old-maid impudence" (33) and "grandmotherly minds" (80) by telling half-truths about their world; when he feels himself trapped by his own words while revealing reproachable things about the rest of the world; or simply when he looks "highly decorated [...] with quite a Henry V air" (84) among the plain dressed audiences of girls.

Van, as a narrator, is also responsible for a number of funny passages in the novel. One of those refers to the sensation he and Jeff have when they face a multitude of women: "We felt like small boys," he describes, "very small boys, caught doing mischief in some gracious lady's house" (19). Later on he compares the men's position surrounded by strong women with that "of the suffragette trying to get to the Parliament buildings through a triple cordon of London police" (23).

Although this is the only literal reference to the Women's Movement of Gilman's day, the whole novel brings up the issues raised in the discussions about the woman's question such as the sexual and economic relationship and the social and economic boundaries of the female sex. According to Lane, in Herland "Gilman romps through the game of what is feminine and what is masculine, what is manly and what is womanly, what is culturally learned and what is biologically determined male-female behavior" (1979:xiii). This is basically what generates the conflict in the novel. In terms of plot what we have in Herland

is the story of three men searching for a supposed women's country with their pre-established ideas and convictions of how such a place would be and their reactions when facing their unfulfilled expectations. A summmary of those is given by Van at a certain point of the novel:

> We had expected them to be given over to what we called "feminine vanity" -- "frills and furbelows," and we found they had evolved a costume more perfect than the Chinese dress, richly beautiful when so desired, always useful, of unfailing dignity and good taste.
>
> We had expected a dull submissive monotony, and found a daring social inventiveness far beyond our own, and a mechanical and scientific development fully equal to ours.
>
> We had expected pettiness, and found a social consciousness besides which our nations looked like quarreling children -- feebleminded ones at that.
>
> We had expected jealousy, and found a broad sisterly affection, a fair-minded intelligence, to which we could produce no parallel.
>
> We had expected hysteria, and found a standard of health and vigour, a calmness of temper, to which the habit of profanity, for instance, was impossible to explain -- we tried it. (81)

Because each man has a distinct personality, they will also have distinct reactions in dealing with the unexpected. Jeff is the one who reacts the least, or else, who reacts more positively to what he finds in Herland. This is because his expectations about a female country are very close to what he encounters. He is described as having the most romantic views about the place. His image of the country as "just blossoming with roses and babies and canaries and tidies" (7) becomes real when he gets there. Also the harmonious society filled with

sisterly love that he envisioned is confirmed.

The only aspect that surprises Jeff is the women themselves. Jeff's conception of woman included all those features of a bisexual world female. He misses in Herlanders, for example, the long hair which made women "so much more feminine" (30). In terms of their inner qualities Jeff is first to notice the strange reaction of Herlanders towards the men. He thinks it odd that Herland women treat them just as they do one another, as equals. Also, the fact that they are not afraid or shy surprises Jeff utterly. Although he does not hold a sexist attitude toward women, he still treats them as the weaker sex. But he does it not because of a sense of superiority, but because of his gentleness. As Van describes: "Jeff's difficulty was his exalted gallantry. He idealized women, and was always looking for a chance to 'protect' or to 'serve' them. These needed neither protection nor service" (89). This difficulty, however, poses no barrier to Jeff's complete adaptation to Herland. He quickly surrenders to the novelties that he faces, growing in his respect and admiration for the women and their country. At times he is described as mischiviously taking the women's side at a discussion by agreeing with them or by making some true remark about the rest of the world that would reveal its inferiority. He becomes so integrated in Herland that he decides to live there forever with his pregnant wife Celis.

Van is the second to be convinced of the superiority of Herland. His conversion, however, is not as smooth as Jeff's. As a man of science, a sociologist, he needs concrete proof of the

impeccability of Herland. He searches and obtains information about its history, its religion, its organization, its people and their living conditions etc. He evaluates each aspect that may present a drawback and usually arrives at the most sensible conclusions. It was not in vain that Gilman chose him to be the narrator. He is the most reliable of the three because he thinks and analyzes before accepting or refuting what he faces. His expectations in relation to a country inhabited only by women were below what he witnesses there. He hardly accepted the possibility of a civilized place without men, but having irrefutable evidence, he rationally acquiesces.

Van's great challenge is to find some failure in such a perfect society. Encouraged by Terry, he constantly searches for something wrong, reprehensible. But he is never successful. He agrees with Terry, however, that in Herland there is no "drama", no excitement. But although he also misses this feature, he understands that the reasons for such flatness are quite positive: "They lacked the sex motive and, with it, jealousy. They had no interplay of warring nations, no aristocracy and its ambitions, no wealth and poverty opposition" (99).

What Van finds more difficult to deal with is the sexual relationship. Although there is no real tension, there is a conflictuous atmosphere between him and Ellador, mainly after their marriage. The core of it lies in the distinct interest each one has regarding their union. Van, who gradually develops a deep feeling for Ellador, intends as any common man to accomplish his love in physical terms, but the feeling she has

for him, the same Celis and Alima have for Jeff and Terry, "phrased itself in their minds in terms of friendship, the one purely personal love they knew, and of ultimate parentage" (96). Marriage for these women means simply the first step in the fulfillment of the great experience of dual parentage, of the New Motherhood. Their interest in the men is solely scientific. They view them as potencial fathers and nothing else. Much of the dialogue between Van and Ellador concerns this very subject. Van tries to explain to her that parentage is not the only reason why people get married, that love between people of different sexes is a "higher stimulus for all creative work" (127) and as such requires no specific reason or purpose to be accomplished. Ellador understands and finds "something very beautiful in the idea" (127), but until she is convinced of the rightness of practicing love for other reasons than for reproduction she will not comply with it. Van, as the man who "used his brains," is patient and finds much happiness even in that odd situation, because he discovers a new kind of love -- "a love that didn't irritate and didn't smother" (142).

The real conflict in the novel is brought about through Terry, the typical macho-man who becomes completely frustrated in relation to his expectations regarding Herland. Terry's supposition in the beginning of the novel reveals his depreciating attitude towards the female sex. Described as very popular among women, Terry envisioned Herland as "a sort of sublimated summer resort -- just Girls and Girls and Girls" (7) where he would immediately be elected the king. Terry had been

quite sure that if such a land existed there would not be any sort of order or organization, any inventions or progress because women, he believed, were incapable of cooperating and achieving anything by themselves. "They would fight among themselves [...] women always do"; "It will be awfully primitive"; "women have always been spinsters. But there they stop -- you'll see" (8). These are some of Terry's assertions about Herland before becoming acquainted with it. His first reaction when he realizes that he is wrong is to cling to the idea that there must be men in the place.

Terry's difficulty, however, lies not so much in accepting that women alone had built that country, but in accepting that Herlanders were so different from his model of the ideal woman. For Terry a real woman should be fragile, submissive, shy dependent, and the women of Herland lacked all these features, which he considered natural female traits. Deep inside what he expected was that a bunch of women thirsty for men would dispute his ownership. "I'll get solid with them all -- and play one bunch against another" (8), he says right in the beginning. His disappointment starts with the strange reaction of those women towards him and the other men. At first, when Jeff and Van agree that there is a different atmosphere in Herland, that the women do not seem to notice their manliness, Terry simply shows himself irritated and attributes this fact to the women's advanced age. Gradually, as he realizes that Herland women are quite different from "the women who like to be run after" (17) to whom he is used, he grows bitter and more aggressive.

Terry never conforms to Herland. He is the one who plans their escape; who objects vehemently against the perfection of Herland and is always trying to find something to blame; the one who reacts openly against the neutralization of Herland. What Terry most misses in Herland are those sex-distinctions -- which ranging from physical aspect to pshychic features -- classify a human being into man or woman. Right in the beginning Terry feels like a neuter just for wearing the same clothes as the women. Towards the end he and the others will prize their beards as their "almost sole distinction among those tall and sturdy women, with their cropped hair and sexless costume" (84). For him, the women of Herland have "neither the vices of men, nor the virtues of women -- they're neuters!" (98). His complaint about the lack of womanliness in Herlanders is commented by Van who agrees that "these women [...] were strikingly deficient in what we call 'femininity' (58). What Van concludes, however, and Terry fails to perceive was that "those feminine charms we are so fond of are not feminine at all, but mere reflected masculinity -- developed to please us because they had to please us, and in no way essential to the real fulfillment of their great process" (59).

The element that aggravates Terry's conflict is his marriage to Alima. By marrying he expects at least to have what he considers a home and a wife. Jeff and Van also desire to live in a separate house after their marriage. But the women of Herland have no idea of the implications of being married. They don't know what being a wife means. They have, according to Van,

"no exact analogue for our word home no more than they had for our Roman-based family" (8). They continue, therefore, living as they always have, travelling around the country as their work as foresters requires. They see no need to set up a separate dwelling to live with their "husbands". Although they hold a well defined sense of personal privacy -- each woman has a room of her own -- they have not, using Van's words, "the faintest idea of that solitude a deux we are so fond of" (125). The inalterability of his previous situation leaves Terry completely dissatisfied after marriage. In his anxiety to possess Alima he does not take into account the inexistence of sex-feeling in Herlanders. "Two thousand years disuse had left very little of the instinct," explains Van, but Terry decides to awake that feeling at once by forcing Alima to love him."as her master" (142) and in doing this he makes his worst and last mistake in Herland.

From the very first Alima represents a challenge to Terry. She is the one who dares taking from his hands the jewels he offers, without being caught. For Terry's combative nature, Alima becomes the only thing he can struggle for and conquer in Herland, a country where there is nothing to oppose because everything is done. "The more coldly she denied him, the hotter his determination," describes Van, who believes that Alima is also driven to Terry because she has a "far-descended atavistic trace of more marked femaleness, never apparent till [he] called it out" (30). Finally, for a man who had been convinced that he would be the king of Herland, it is quite a hard fate for Terry

to be "tamed and trained" like a domestic animal and eventually kicked and expelled by those he expected would become his subjects. The great lesson is provided by Van who, assuming that he, as well as Jeff and Terry, "were not in the least 'advanced' on the woman question" (9), admits at the end of the novel that they "were now well used to seeing women not as females but as people; people of all sorts, doing every kind of work" (137). Through Van's words Gilman transmits her message.

CHAPTER III

SCHREINER'S THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

Critics have often applied a number of key words to describe Olive Schreiner's personality and have often linked them somewhat to her work. Tragedy, neurosis, failure, pessimism, contradiction, pity, martyrdom are some terms that not rarely appear on essays about Schreiner. She has been criticized for being obsessed by the Woman's Question (WOOLF 182); she has been condemned for not identifying herself fully with other women and for preferring male to female friendship (BARASH 269); she has been censured for being unable to blame man for women's oppression and finally for being incapable of concluding some of her works. Although Schreiner helped to build this negative assessment about herself by disclosing in her writings her miserable childhood and her conflictuous

adolescence and adulthood, this image of her has been created mainly by psychoanalytic interpreters who undermine her intellectual value by focusing on her problematic personality (STANLEY 241).

Nevertheless, there are also positive aspects about Schreiner's character and work which fortunately many critics have not failed to observe and analyse. One such critic is Liz Stanley, who considers Schreiner's contradictoriness and negativism a consequence of her determination to live what she preached, and not a sign of a weak personality. In facing situations which might hurt and disappoint her, Schreiner showed her strength and complexity. "Frequently she failed," states Stanley, "but her 'failure' was as interesting as any more ordinary 'success' would have been" (231). In order to appreciate Schreiner's power as a theorist and writer it is necessary, warns Stanley, "to evaluate her only within her own time and among her own contemporaries" (231).

Within this perspective the body of work Schreiner produced has a significant importance. Besides The Story of an African Farm (1883), her first and best-known novel, Schreiner wrote other fictional works. Her novels Undine (1929) and the uncompleted From Man to Man (1926), although published posthumously, were written in the very beginning of her career. Her short stories are gathered into three volumes: Dreams (1890), Dream Life and Real Life (1893) and Stories, Dreams and Allegories (1923). Schreiner's theoretical works are mainly related with the political, economical, social and racial

questions of South Africa. A declared socialist, pacifist, anti-racist and anti-imperialist, Schreiner disclosed her ideas on these matters through a series of articles/essays such as: "The Political Situation" (1896), "Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland" (1887) -- a political allegory, "An English South African's View of the Situation" (1899), "A Letter on The Jew (1906), "Closer Union" (1909) and "Thoughts on South Africa" published in 1923, after her death. Schreiner's favorite topic, however, was the woman's question. This subject she developed in what became her most famous theoretical book **Woman and Labor** (1911) and used as the theme for most of her fictional work. According to Stanley, however, Schreiner's "holistic approach" turned all her writings into a unity. Stanley believes that for Schreiner "all of her writings were political, because all of them deal with the same fundamental themes" (237). This interconnection of Schreiner's life, politics and writings is present in **The Story of an African Farm**, a personal and political novel which anticipates a great deal of what was to be exposed later in **Women and Labor** and unveils much of the doubts and conflicts Schreiner experienced.

Differently from **Herland**, Gilman's utopian novel, the narrative in **The Story** is quite realistic. In its "Preface" Schreiner comments on her choice for "painting human life" through "the method of the life we all lead". There is the "stage method", she explains, where the whole thing is predictable, where the characters appear and re-appear at the very moment they are needed. In the realistic method Schreiner

chooses, however, "nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes the man who would fit it does not return". Schreiner's decision of portraying the real life rather than creating an ideal one in her novel implies that she has to include in it the difficulties and limitations of reality. Unlike Gilman who, by choosing the utopic genre, was free to create a perfect society with faultless people in it, Schreiner had to deal with all the complexities of the human soul grown within a hostile environment.

The events in Schreiner's novel take place on an isolated South African farm at the end of the 19th century. The weariness of the surrounding is revealed in the description of the place. Under the moonlight it is "touched by a weird and an almost oppressive beauty" (1) and the lonely and monotonous plain is broken only by a solitary "kopie" (a small hillock). By daylight the landscape is no less suffocating: "The plain was a weary flat of loose red sand sparcely covered by dry karoo bushes that cracked beneath the tread like tinder, and showed the red earth everywhere" (45). Although the place is sometimes depicted in the fruitful season of spring, the prevailing atmosphere is one of dryness and heaviness, as described in the passage relating the drought of 1862.

> From end to end of the land the earth cried for water. Man and beast turned their eyes to the pitiless sky, that like the roof of some brazen oven arched overhead. On the farm, day after day, month after month, the water in the dams fell lower and lower; the sheep died in the fields;

> the cattle, scarcely able to crawl, tottered as they moved from spot to spot in search of food. Week after week, month after month, the sun looked down from the cloudless sky, till the karoo-bushes were leafless sticks, broken into the earth; and the earth itself was naked and bare; and only the milk-bushes, like old hags, pointed their shrivelled fingers heavenwards, praying for the rain that never came. (11)

The repetitive pattern of the description suggests also the unalterable and uneventful life of the people on the farm. The primitivism of the spot and its isolatedness from civilization is evoked by the reference to some Bushman paintings on the rocks and through conjectures about the original physical aspect of the site.

The lifeless setting seems to reflect the strained human relations within it. In the first part of the novel the restraint is more deeply felt by the children: Waldo, Lyndall and Em. Lyndall and her cousin Em are both orphans. They experience the tyranny of the farm owner Tant Sannie, the Boer-Woman that Em's father married before he died. Waldo is also a motherless child who helps his father old Otto in his task of overseeing the farm. Waldo tastes his father's incapacity to perceive and heal his griefs rooted in his religious conflicts, although Otto is a loving man and a strict follower of Christ's words. Waldo also witnesses passively the fall of his good-hearted father caused by devilish Bonaparte Blenkins, who will then make Waldo's life even more miserable. The children's lives are marked by frequent moments of loneliness, doubts, despair and silent revolt, mainly on the part of Waldo and Lyndall.

Unlike Em, who will inherit the farm and is in a way more integrated to the environment, Waldo and Lyndall are complete outsiders. They are or become both orphans, they are poor and present signs of having a higher intellectual development. The farm and the life they lead is too limiting for them.

Their way to go beyond the mediocrity and restrictions imposed by their living conditions is through reading, when possible, and dreaming. Lyndall dreams of becoming rich and wise. She is determined to make Tant Sannie send her to School, where she shall learn and know everything. Waldo, not having the possibility to obtain formal education, sticks to the books left by Em's father in search of knowledge and comfort:

> All he read he did not fully understand; the thoughts were new to him; but this was the fellow's startled joy in the book -- the thoughts were his, they belonged to him. (...) The boy's heavy body quivered with excitement. So he was not alone, not alone. (85-86)

But Waldo's interest for books is temporarily destroyed by the ignorant and despotic rulers of the farm, and he grows even more solitary and introspective. The powerlesness of the young before oppressive circumstances and insensitive adults and the suffering resulting from it will accompany them to adolescence and adulthood. However, what will constrain them is no longer a single person but the whole set of prejudices and conventions of a conservative and unfair society.

During the four years she spends in a boarding school, Lyndall undergoes the same restrictions she was subjected to on

the farm, while she was a child. When she returns she relates to Waldo:

> They are called finishing schools, and the name tells accurately what they are. They finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate. They are nicely adapted machines for experimenting on the question 'Into how little space a human soul can be crushed?'(171)

But Lyndall finds her own way not to be 'crushed'. She is given a room where she can be alone to read, think and learn by herself. During this period she becomes deeply interested in the woman's question. She learns about the limitations imposed on the female sex regarding their personal and professional fulfillment; she feels the differentiated treatment given to men and women; she witnesses the waste of power that women spend on unimportant issues because they are not allowed to direct it to higher activities; she discovers the false idea of freedom with which women live; she becomes conscious of the damage caused by social and religious convention in women's minds and, finally, she learns how strong a woman must be if she wants to break with those conventions. Moreover, not only the farm and the boarding school will prove to be oppressive settings, but also the society at large and the historical period in which she lives, for she exclaims:

> (...) But this one thought stands, never goes -- if I might but be one of those born in the future; then perhaps, to be born a woman will not be to be born branded. (174)

Like Lyndall, Waldo's contact with the world outside the farm is oppressive, although he learns a lot from it. He leaves the farm in order to experience and "see everything" (186). He goes to a number of different places, engages in a series of jobs and meets some disgusting people. He comes across a world filled with unworthy values where people are driven by money and appearances. He endures mental and physical degradation caused by excess of mechanical work. He knows the brutality and hypocrisy of beings supposed to be human. He becomes more unhappy and lonely than he did in the farm, where at least he felt integrated with nature, and concludes that society plays an unbearable pressure upon him, as he reports to Lyndall:

> I was not meant to live among people. Perhaps some day, when I am grown older, I will be able to go and live among them and look at them as I look at the rocks and bushes, without letting them disturb me and take myself from me; but not now. So I grew miserable; a kind of fever seemed to eat me; I could not rest, or read or think; so I came back here. (258)

Waldo's self inquiry as he sees the sea for the first time in his life seems to parallel the question raised in the beginning of this analysis about the literary subgenre chosen by Gilman and Schreiner for their novels. When Waldo perceives that the "long, low, blue monotonous mountain" is the sea he had always dreamed of he wonders: "Is the ideal always more beautiful than the real?" (254). Gilman's ideal society in Herland is undoubtedly more beautiful than the one Schreiner depicts in The Story of an African Farm, but it is also less

human in the sense that it does not consider the complexities and faults of the human character within a problematic setting. From his initial disappointment Waldo grows to appreciate and love the sea. The real vision of it made him realize that:

> Of all the things I have ever seen, only the sea is like a human being: the sky is not, nor the earth. But the sea is always moving, always something deep in itself is stirring it. It never rests; it is always wanting, wanting, wanting. It hurries on; and then it creeps back slowly without having reached, moaning. It is always asking a question and it never gets an answer. (255)

Comparing the sea with another element he has always wondered about -- the sky -- Waldo concludes: "The sky is better, but it is so high above our heads. I love the sea. Sometimes we must look down too" (255). Waldo's words sound like a metaphorical explanation of Schreiner's option for the realistic genre.

The characters, like the setting, are also portrayed realistically. They present all the features of the human soul with its longings and secrets, its anxieties and conflicts, its needs and frustrations. Waldo and Lyndall fit this profile well. Their inmost thoughts, their intellectual and spiritual development are disclosed to the reader. Their conflicts have distinct origins, but they are equally intense. Waldo's personal drama lies mainly in his constant spiritual crisis. His childhood and adolescence are marked by intercalated periods of silent belief and acceptance of Christian dogmas with moments of complete skepticism and rejection of the blind faith preached by

the Bible. He constantly swings from a state of grace with religion, when he feels protected by a divine presence, to a state of despair and revolt, when he feels abandoned and excluded from the world of faith. Waldo's wandering through the spiritual and intellectual world is symbolically narrated in "Times and Seasons", an intermediate chapter between the first and second parts of the novel. Here Schreiner beautifully describes the "seasons of the soul's life" (113) in terms of its most profound doubts and conflicts.

Lyndall is also a very complex character. As a little girl she already shows some features which reveal her strength and determination. She is critical and skeptical, witty, proud and extremelly self-controlled. Her reaction when outraged is to bite her lips instead of crying or showing any pain. Lyndall's inner self is disclosed mainly in the second part of the novel when she returns to the farm a grown up adolescent. By this time she had discovered the delightfulness of being a woman, but also the problems that it implied. She has become conscious of her self control and shows signs of discontent: "I am never miserable and never happy. I wish I were" (171). She has internalized she is an unfeeling being: "When I was a baby, I fancy my parents left me out in the frost one night and I got nipped internally -- it feels so!" (173). Lyndall's conflict is rooted in the clash between her ideas about the position of woman and the difficulties she finds in putting them into practice. As a child Lyndall had already dreamed of her independence, of leaving the farm and acquiring knowledge, of

having things of her own, of being rich. As a woman Lyndall realizes that in order to be completely free and achieve the things she dreamed of, she has to give up part of her self, her romantic self. As Rachel Duplessis observes, Lyndall is "a female hero torn between feminist convictions and romantic thralldom" (26).

The similarity between Waldo and Lyndall is not a mere coincidence, for they are both representatives of Schreiner's self (BARASH 272). While Waldo brings up Schreiner's religious dilemmas as a child, Lyndall refers to Schreiner's inner battles between her feminist ideas and the reminiscences of a severe Victorian upbringing allied with her emotional demands. The identification between these characters is made explicit through Lyndall's own words: "When I am with you I never know that I am a woman and you are a man; I only know that we are both things that think" (200). As "projections" of Schreiner (cf. DUPLESSIS 25), Waldo and Lyndall are also the spokespersons of her ideas, in the same way that the characters in Herland are Gilman's. Didacticism, however, is not an exclusive feature of the utopian genre. As Gilman, Schreiner found in her novel an effective way to spread her ideas and reach people's consciousness. The "overt preaching" in The Story, as Liz Stanley observes, is effected both through the allegories within the novel with their explicit moral messages, and through the character's speech (240).

Lyndall's discourse on the woman's position, for example, is a compilation of what Scheiner was to preach in her Woman and Labor. Lyndall antecipates Schreiner's views on the poor

educational system women are offered, the restricted professional choices allowed to them, the atrophying upbringing they undergo -- "We fit our sphere as a Chinese woman's foot fits her shoe" (175) --, and on the powerlessness of most women before the strength of social pressure --." A little bitterness, a little longing when we are young, a little futile search for work, a little passionate striving for room for the exercise of our powers, -- and there we go with the drove. A woman must march with her regiment" (176). Lyndall condemns marriage as the only way for women to achieve some respect and material comfort and criticizes bitterly those who capitulate and marry for convenience comparing them to prostitutes: "but a woman who has sold herself even for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way" (177). Her speech also touches on the question of maternity, emphasizing Schreiner's opinion and repeating the same idea developed by Gilman in Herland. The one great and noble work left to women, preaches Lyndall, is badly accomplished because they lack the culture it requires. Finally Schreiner's idealism is also comprised in Lyndall's discourse when she talks about a New "Time":

> It is for love's sake yet more than for any other that we look for that new time (...) Then when that time comes, she said slowly, when love is no more bought or sold, when it is not a means of making bread, when each woman's life is filled with earnest, independent labour, then love will come to her, a strange sudden sweetness breaking in upon her earnest work, "not sought for, but found. Then; but not now --." (183)

Apart from Lyndall, who stands for the "New Woman", there are two other female characters in the novel, Em and Tant Sannie. Em, Lyndall's cousin, is the prototype of a "true woman", for she holds all the qualities considered essentially feminine according to the Victorian standard of womanhood. Since childhood Em demonstrates a fragile and dependent nature. Contrary to Lyndall who always represses her feelings, Em is constantly seen weeping when injured, as one who cries for protection.

Em's expectations as a child are the same as those of any conventional girl. Instead of going to school, Em thinks of marriage as the only possibility for her future. When Gregory Rose comes to the farm and soon declares his love for her, Em starts fulfilling her romantic dreams. Their declaration scene is described as a "little human farce", due to Gregory's exaggerated tone and Em's confused feelings as to accepting marriage or not. From the beginning Em's attitude is one of servitude and obedience towards the loved one. She agrees never to kiss Waldo again for Gregory's sake, and promises to do everything he asks her. She has absorbed so deeply the concept of female inferiority that she considers herself unworthy of Gregory's love, attributing her incapacity of loving him as much as he loves her to her condition of being "only a woman" (165).

Domesticity, which is also praised as one of the ideal woman qualities, appears in Em's concept of marriage: "Every day, when Gregory came home, tired from his work, he would look

about and say, 'where is my wife? Has no one seen my wife? Wife, some coffee!' and she would give him some" (167). In spite of her conventional views on female roles and behavior Em is an extremely generous and sympathetic woman who gives up her lover when perceiving he is in love with Lyndall. Instead of considering Lyndall a rival, Em continues loving and admiring her. When Gregory leaves the farm after Lyndall, who has departed with a stranger, Em waits patiently for his return and accepts him back as her future husband. Nevertheless, she loses the excitement towards marriage, comparing it to an empty box.

Tant Sannie represents the tyrannical woman, the one who uses her power to oppress other women. However, she inspires more pity and repulse for her ignorance and insensibility than properly hate. She is also a laughable character. The description of her physical appearance, her reaction when she learns the truth about Bonaparte, her attitude towards a new suitor, the way she treats her new husband are situations full of comicity. Her opinions on the position of women are the most conservative and prejudicious as possible. Marriage for her is the best and only achievement of any woman: "If the beloved Redeemer didn't mean men to have wives what did He make women for? (...) What does she think the Lord took all that trouble in making her for nothing? It's evident He wants babies, otherwise why does He send them?" (295) asks Tant Sannie with the superiority of one who considers herself an expert on the subject. "As for a husband", she goes on in her advice to Em, "it's very much the same who one has. Some men are fat, some men

are thin; some men drink brandy, and some man drink gin; but it all comes to the same thing in the end; it's all one. A man's a man you know" (295). That Tant Sannie is a reactionary is clearly revealed in her opinion about progress and the new inventions: "Let them make their steam-wagons and their fire-carriages; let them go on as though the dear Lord didn't know what he was about when He gave horses and oxen legs, -- the destruction of the Lord will follow them" (296).

Old Otto and Bonaparte Blenkins are the two adult male characters who appear in the first part of the novel. Otto, Waldo's father, is the overseer of the farm. His strong germanic appearance contrasts with his candid, kind, trustful and child-like nature. Extremely religious, Otto cultivates a blind belief in the Biblical precepts and does a literal and therefore distorted reading of the Bible. His ingenuity and singleheartedness allows Bonaparte to take advantage of him and eventually to provoke his death. Otto is supposed to represent Olive's own father, a dreamy and unpractical man who proved incapable of supporting his family in every sense, despite his generosity or even because of that.

Bonaparte is the woolf in sheep's skin who relies on Otto's naïvete to penetrate in the farm household and acquire Tant Sannie's trust. As a coward and selfish villain, Bonaparte is also responsible for a number of funny passages in the novel. One of such is his speech during the Sunday service, which he does in Otto's place. His discourse is empty of religious values and completely materialistic. In it Bonaparte exalts life on

earth, the body and the clothes, the comfort of a bed, the delight of food. With his big red nose, in which Tant Sannie believed to see the devil, when he first came in rags to the farm, Bonaparte caused a much different impression than when he preached all dressed up in Otto's new black clothes. The same positive effect had his words, which although uncomprehensible, were heard with tears. Bonaparte's villainy is temporarily punished with his expulsion from the farm, when his real intentions are accidentally unveiled. But in the end of the novel he reappears triumphant.

The last male character to be incorporated into the novel is Gregory Rose, a man described as having some female traits. The first references to his feminine personality are found in the description of his hut -- "scrupulously neat and clean" (157), in the pink sheet he chooses to write to his sister, in his preoccupation in seeming conceited or unmanly when looking at himself in the mirror, in his complaint about his father's rejection of his "fine nature", and in the exaggerated tone of his letter. Lyndall refers to him as a "man-woman" (185): "There (...) goes a true-woman" she says when seeing him -- "one born for the sphere that some women have to fill without being born for it. How happy he would be sewing frills into his little girl's frocks, and how pretty he would look sitting in a parlour with a rough man making love to him!" (185). What Lyndall's comment reveals, in fact, is Gregory's prejudicious mind. For her Gregory is one of those creatures who divide the world into male and female spheres and classifies the human behavior as

proper or improper for this or that sex. He finds, for instance, some of Lyndall's attitude unwomanly, such as "going about with a man she is not engaged to" (195) or driving out alone (196). Gregory's femaleness culminates when he travests himself as a nurse to take care of dying Lyndall. According to Carol L. Barash this episode reflects the male character's unconscious but profound desire to unite the male and female spheres (273). Another example she provides refers to Waldo's creations as offspring. Both his sheepshearing machine and his carving take nine months to be produced.

For Rachel Duplessis, the complexity of the passage depicting "a tranvestite -- trapped between male and female" nursing "a dying feminist -- trapped in a crossfire of thralldom and quest (...) shows the author's conviction that conventional gender roles repress human growth and social progress" (28). In Duplessis' view, this episode dealing with gender alternatives portrays Schreiner's strategy of changing the narrative pattern and the character conventions (28). Duplessis states that this strategy which she calls "writing beyond the ending" (21), meaning writing beyond a conventional narrative, pervades the whole novel shaping also the plot with its three stories: the religious, the Bildungs and the romantic or feminist story.

The Story of an African Farm is divided into two sections, childhood and adulthood. The religious story takes place in the first part of the novel. Using her own experience as a child who early in life perceived the incongruities of a religion imposed by her family and decided to adopt her own religious code,

Schreiner depicted in this story the negative effect of blind faith on uncritical minds. The battle between good and evil is personified by Old Otto versus Bonaparte Blenkins. Otto is unable to detect the ill intentions of Bonaparte, although he ironically claims to identify a rogue "from the beginning" in the book he reads. His unswerving belief in Bonaparte's words is the same that he bestows to religious matters. Answering Lyndall's question on the veracity of Bonaparte's stories, he cries:

> That is what I do hate! (...) know that is true! How do you know that anything is true? Because you are told so. If we begin to question everything -- proof, proof, proof, what will we have to believe left? How do you know the angel opened the prison door for Peter, except that Peter said so? How do you know that God talked to Moses, except that Moses wrote it? That is what I hate!" (32)

So Otto gives Bonaparte his bed, his hat, his brandy, his food, his boots, his new black clothes, his Sunday Service and is rewarded with lies, ingratitude, trickery and treason. Otto is too sensitive to endure such a stroke and on the night he is unjustly expelled from the farm, he dies. The triumph of evil over good, for Bonaparte reappears in a quite advantageous position in the last chapter, portrays an unexpected and unconventional ending, conveying in Duplessis words, a rupture in the narrative.

The same rupture will mark the conclusion of the second story -- the Bildungs plot, whose protagonist is Waldo. In the

stranger does not recognize Waldo and what seemed to be a promising event in Waldo's quest plot comes to nothing (DUPLESSIS 24). Lyndall's warning to Waldo, then, becomes concrete:

> If you go into the world aimless, without a definite object, dreaming -- dreaming, you will be definitely defeated, bamboozled, knocked this way and that. (206)

That is the way Waldo returns to the farm, with nothing but a bundle in his hands. He returns for Lyndall because he discovers that it is her he wants, in her he deposits his hopes and expectations, through her he fullfils himself as he writes in a letter:

> I am very helpless, I shall never do anything, but you will work, and I will take your work for mine. Sometimes such a sudden gladness seizes me when I remember that somewhere in the world you are living and working. You are my very own; nothing else is my own so. (159)

His words, however, will never be read, for Lyndall is already dead. Waldo's last chance to find an aim to his life is gone. Shortly after he learns about Lyndall's death, Waldo also dies. The readers' expectations towards this character remain unfulfilled and the same feeling of incompletion will appear in the romantic and feminist story centered on Lyndall.

Lyndall's plot begins when she, as a child, makes her option as to which side she is going to stand on in society. On the night that Otto is expelled and the girls are locked in

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to the first, she fears to end as the dependent and submissive woman she so grimly condemns; if she neglects it, giving way to her reason, her emotional side will be incomplete. As Dupplessis observes, Schreiner "made a character who must fight against herself within herself" (27). Lyndall's hazardous moments are noticed in her conversation with Waldo about a New Woman and a New Time: "Speak! Speak!" She says, "the difficulty is not to speak; the difficulty is to keep silence" (183). And later: "To see the good and the beautiful (...) and to have no strength to live it, is only to be Moses on the Mountain of Nebo, with the land at your feet and no power to enter. It would be better not to see it" (184). In another passage Lyndall clearly confesses to be weary of her burden, that is, her conflictuous self. She bursts out before Old Otto's grave:

> I am so tired. There is light. There is warmth, (...) Why am I alone, so hard, so cold? I am so weary of myself! It is eating my soul to its core -- self, self, self! I can not bear this life! I cannot breathe, I cannot live! Will nothing free me from myself? (...) I want to love! I want something great and pure to lift me to itself! Dear old man, I cannot bear it any more! I am so cold, so hard, so hard; will no one help me?" (235)

What Lyndall seems unable to perceive, as suggested by the narrator, is that "redemption is from within and neither from God nor man" (235). The fairy -tale ideology still confounds Lyndall's psychological and emotional development, making her believe that someone must awaken her, as in Sleeping Beauty's, so that she can do something for herself and the world: "I am

asleep, swathed, shut up in myself", she claims; "till I have been delivered I will deliver no one". In the end, as she lies in her deathbed talking about her dead baby, she comments on the one the reader expected would be her "deliverer": "Its father was not my prince" (277).

Although Lyndall does not get totally rid of her romantic fantasies, she sticks to her feminist convictions and tries to live them as she can, but because she is alone, all she gets is a tragic end. Her end parallels Napoleon's in the story she tells Em and Waldo: "He was one and they were many, and they got him down at last" (15). For Liz Stanley "Lyndall's rebellion is one doomed to failure, not because there was anything wrong with her analysis but because she is essentially alone" (237).

The reader's sense of satisfaction, as Schreiner warns in the Preface of the novel, is again unfulfilled in the romantic plot. Lyndall dies because she does not overcome the loss of her baby and does not resolve her inner conflicts. Although Lyndall and Waldo are not successful in their achievements, they represent what Schreiner considered "the most advanced individuals" (1911:285) of her time, because they are not insensible to the deep and rapid changes going on in society by then. A passage in Woman and Labor illustrates well why Lyndall and Waldo's failure is not a sign of weakness, but of complexity and sensibility:

> Within the individuality itself of such persons goes on, in an intensified form, that very

> struggle, conflict, and disco-ordination which is going on in society at large between its different members and sections; and agonizing moments must arise, when the individual seeing the necessity for adopting new courses of action, or for accepting new truths, or conforming to new conditions, will yet be tortured by the hold of traditional convictions; and the men or women who attempt to adapt their life to the new material conditions and to harmony with new knowledge are almost bound at some time to rupture the continuity of their own psychological existence. (284)

CONCLUSION

The conception Gilman and Schreiner held of the function of art and the duty of the artist defined by Schreiner in the "Preface" to The Story of an African Farm as that of "painting what lies before him" was carried out in their novels. Although they employed distinct ways of accomplishing it, they both were successful in portraying what constituted the main concerns of their time.

Both inserted in their fiction the problematic issue of women's status in society as second-class citizens. They criticized the difference of opportunities bestowed on men and women, ranging from the educational system to the limited professional choices women were offered. They brought about the changing roles of women as mothers and wives and the conflicts resulting from these changes through female characters that embody both the conventional and the "new woman". And finally they infused in their novels the claim for the necessity of

social reform.

This attitude of attributing a function to literary work, is the main cause for Gilman and Schreiner's non-recognition and undervaluation by literary critics. It is usually pointed out that their concern with the content rather than with the style of their writings has diminished their art. Both have been described as having a "careless" style. Patricia Stubbs comments that Schreiner's fiction "is flawed by lapses into rhetoric, long passages of angry denunciation or personal bitterness" (17). Virginia Woolf, on reviewing The Letters of Olive Schreiner, defines her as "a diamond marred by a flaw" since her obsession for "questions affecting women" prevented her from developing her skills as an artist (182-183).

Like Schreiner, Charlotte Perkins Gilman is also not viewed by critics as an outstanding artist. Ann J. Lane says that Gilman "wrote quickly, carelessly, to make a point" (1980:xvi). Carl Degler states that "Gilman's poetry, like her prose, was straightforward, lucid, but without much imagery or deep sensibility. It depended for its appeal more upon wit, clever turns of phrase, and ideas than upon rhythm or aesthetic expression" (1966:xiii). About her fiction Degler concludes: "Despite her feelings for words and the easy flow of language on paper and tongue [Gilman] showed little talent for imaginative writing" (1966:xviii).

Indeed, Gilman and Schreiner were much more interested in the impact that the content of their novels would cause in the readers' mind than with their form and style. The question of

literary quality was, therefore, clearly subordinated to the ideological appeal. Nevertheless, fiction was for them the most effective way to convey their ideas.

For Schreiner, "the amount of social fiction and consequent human suffering (...) is perhaps only describable in the medium of art, where actual concrete individuals are shown acting and reacting on each other -- as in the novel or the drama" (W&L 282). In the introduction to **Woman and Labor** Schreiner explains that in its first version, destroyed during the Boer War, she included in each chapter one or more allegories to enhance her argumentative prose (9). The blending of fiction with polemic prose, of political with literay matters is for Schreiner a way "to stimulate other minds" (9). In her theoretical book she admits not to be worried with "repetitions" or "lack of literary polish" because its importance lies in the subject matter itself (14). In her literary work, however, she does not seem totally careless about style. Although it is true that the over-preaching resulting from her view on literature sometimes compromises the aesthetic quality of her novel, it does not fully destroy the beauty and depth of the whole, for it provides a rather pleasant reading.

The preoccupation with ideas also marks Gilman's fictional work. **Herland** is clearly didactic and, although it is not so elaborate in terms of language and imagery, it is still a playful book. Aware that "the popular thought of our day is voiced in fiction, fluent verse, and an incessant play of humor" (W&E 150), Gilman portrays in a highly spirited novel the

thought of a great number of women of her day. She presents female heroines who are very different "from the Evelinas and Arabellas of the last century" (W&E 49), putting into practice what she believed to be happening in the fiction of her time: "women are continually taking larger place in the action of the story. They are given personal characteristics beyond those of physical beauty. And they are no longer content to be; they do" (50). Gilman's literary works, as Lane puts it, "constitute part of her ideological world-view and that, rather than their literary quality, is what primarily gives them their interest and their power" (1990:289), and I would add, their value.

Maybe the assessment of Gilman and Schreiner as creative writes should take into account the authors' purpose in writing them. If their intention was to fictionalize their theories in order to reach the readers' consciousness, they have certainly achieved their aim, and in doing so, they shall not be evaluated as good or bad novelists, but as successful writers.

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